

||Listening

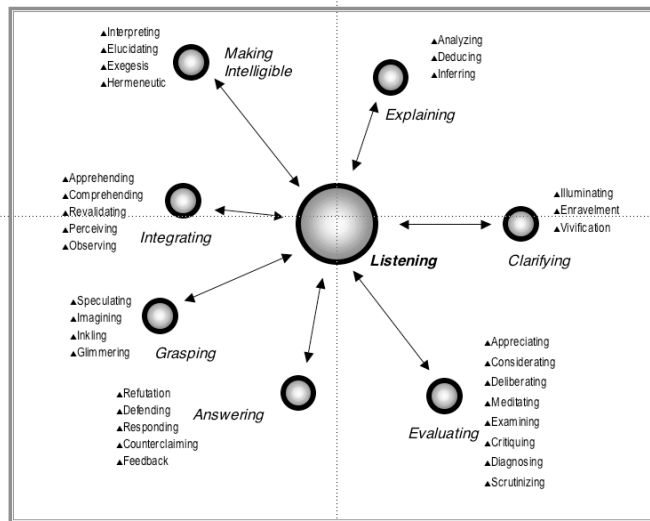
Introduction

Paying attention to listening is paying attention to the cradle of our infinitely unfolding communal life, in any sphere of human activity: business, politics, citizenship, or family. Therefore, what you will find in this text, we expect, will invite you to fruitful reflections in multiple directions.

My primary concern in this paper is to organize an understanding of listening that can enrich the work of engineers and business executives involved in innovative design projects.

The careful work of George Gadamer in “Truth and Method” was the leading voice in noticing the space opened by Martin Heidegger’s “Being and Time,” and unlocked his inquiry into notions such as hermeneutics, interpreting, articulating, and language. Before both of them was Nietzsche “philosophizing with a hammer,” who called our attention to unsustainable modern certainties, creating enormous spaces for questions on language and thinking. They have been fundamental voices in preparing us to have the possibility of opening up a vast human phenomenon: listening.

Words in the proximity of Listening



Listening.

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Hearing and Listening

Hearing versus Listening

There are two pervasive beliefs in Western commonsense about listening that are profoundly misleading: First, that hearing and listening are an equivalent phenomenon; and second, that when we listen we capture information that is transmitted to us by a particular speaker.

Through this paper, I will explore the consequences of these misunderstandings. In the process of doing so, I will attempt to keep alive the underlying thinking that led Fernando Flores¹ to start to frame this reflection in the early 1980s.

Let's start working with the distinction between hearing and listening. We propose that hearing is about sounds, noises, or music. Hearing is the capacity of distinguishing sounds, and identifying patterns of sounds, so they can be observed, appreciated, and shaped. Competent musicians can exercise these distinctions with incredible subtleties. They can distinguish notes, rhythms, harmonies, sonority, and so forth. Following in the same line, another example is phonetic coaches that train people in the sounds of words and correct people's accents, to make them more intelligible in specific communities. Being a good hearer of a conversation requires being able to identify a sequence of words –more precisely phonemes- in the exact sequence in which they are performed, and beyond that, to have the capacity to memorize and reproduce them with accuracy. They can repeat accurately whatever someone says. What they repeat are the sounds of the words that name specific linguistic distinctions without consideration to what is distinguished.

This capacity can be extremely relevant when you are trying to record or register an event, or when you are trying to produce some sort of experimental music based on word sounds. However, it can become extremely annoying, boring, or wasteful when you are looking for a

¹ [I was Fernando Flores' student in his legendary Ontological Design Program, as well as his collaborator in Business Design Associates for more than five years. The basic notions in this paper come from that experience.](#)

fruitful dialogue. Even when you are trying to assure a particular coordination happens, this habit of repeating what was asked word-by-word can be misleading.

Words gain their meaning, their capacity to distinguish, in the middle of communal life. Words do not have meaning in and of themselves. Dictionaries provide us with word usages validated by particular communities. This is, in many situations, a valuable help. Nevertheless, it does not help us in dealing with particular situations, in which the meaning of the words that come out of a particular speaker is created in the listening of a particular targeted audience. We cannot control the way in which our words are invested of meaning in others' listening.

In listening, there are at least three phenomena unfolding at the same time, three phenomena that are triggered when we involve ourselves in conversations, three phenomena that we do not control, we do not choose, but that happen automatically to us in the very moment we listen.

In listening, worlds are disclosed; plots are articulated; and observations, assessments, and commitments are brought forth. We will talk in some detail about each of these, but before that, we will sketch our first articulation of the distinction listening. We claim that listening is the capacity of bringing forth possibilities that were not available before for a particular individual or community being listened to. In synthesis, hearing is about bringing forth and distinguishing sound/phonemes that denote words, and listening is about bringing forth possibilities in communal language.

In our daily activity, we have, or report, the experience of being listened to when someone else is able to affect the way we were "listening" to a particular situation. We are listened to when, as a result of a conversation, some of our already available interpretations configuring the situation are changed, substituted, re-contextualized, or simply when a deep and void-filled silence takes the place of a previously agitated internal argument. Only in those situations, can bringing forth new possibilities that before were not available, or even thinkable, be achieved.

In other words, to listen implies to unsettle. An experience of being unsettled can be brought about in many different fashions. Sometimes just the presence, or embodiment of a particular mood, is enough to produce a major displacement in the background out of which a conversation

evolves, freeing the actors to explore previously unnoticed realms. Sometimes the re-arrangement of the physical space and its object will do, as happens in the atmosphere created by monumental temples or by the wilderness. For the time being, we will focus our attention just in the ways language unsettles, and discloses and brings forth possibilities. In other words, we will keep our attention on the ways in which language shapes our listening.

We will distinguish three linguistic unities out of which listening can be explored, articulated, or unsettled: discourses, narratives, and commitments.

Discourses

Let's use a familiar example. When we are interviewed for a job, we engage in a conversation in which we listen and we are listened to in many directions. For instance, we listen to our potential employer's concerns and they listen to the potential possibility we represent for them. That conversation in which we listen, and we are listened to, is built out of specific discourses. If we are software development engineers we will be asked about previous "software design projects," "programming languages," "testing experience," "sandbox management," or experience with "Product Requirement Systems"—all distinctions that belong to the discourse of Software Engineering. We will also be asked about our economical expectations, and we will ask about "salaries," "bonuses," "stock options," "severance packages," and "corporate expenses"—all distinctions that belong to the discourse of finances, economics and HR. And finally, another part of the inquiry will ask for "our future," "ambitions," "style," "preferences," and so forth—distinctions that belong to the discourses of ethics and developmental psychology. Each time that we are listening and being listened to, we are already in a world shaped by discourses of distinctions that configure our capacity to observe and act.

We human beings are linguistic beings that invent distinctions in conversation with other human beings for the sake of taking care of particular human concerns. These conversations have taken place across the centuries, and involve vast networks of people listening to each other in multiple medias: books, magazines, white papers, chats, blogs, phones, videos, conferences and so forth. In all these conversations, there is sound consensus on some basic distinctions upon which the discourse is built, and also intense controversial interpretations upon other, not yet established, distinctions. Some distinctions are brought forth, creating completely new spaces of reality; and some distinctions are discarded,

collapsing the realities they previously brought with them. This vital historical conversation is what we call a discourse.

Physics and Chemistry are discourses that allow us to deal with the recurrences, stabilities, and breakdowns of our material existence. They include mastering the metals and elements out of which agricultural devices helped our peasants, weapons that allow us to kill our enemies, fertilizers to exploit the earth we belong to, or pharmaceutical substances to alleviate our pain.

Discourses gain relevance as far as they expand our capacity to deal with specific breakdowns. Chemistry and Microbiology have been very powerful discourses across the 20th century. The reason can be articulated in very simple terms. These discourses were able to invent distinctions to make observations of events that were not possible to observe before—like observable cultures of invisible microorganisms. In doing so, they created the possibility of making new kinds of assessments—such as microorganism’s culture strengths. Through this, they allowed us to create new original offers many orders of magnitude more powerful than previous ones—like vaccines. This world is being radically unsettled today by the emergence of biotechnology and nanotechnology discourses, which have the potential to create a whole new realm of science.

We human beings observe with our linguistic distinctions. Our eyes are blind, our ears deaf, without a discourse of distinctions in which realities are brought to existence. Where we do not have distinctions, we are cognitively blind. We are in a vulnerable condition in which we are ignorant about our own ignorance—oblivious.

In general, we will claim that powerful discourses are the discourses that allow us to make powerful offers, and powerful distinctions are the ones that allow us to observe and perform powerful actions. In opposition, weak discourses and distinctions are discourses out of which reliable and strong offers are not possible. That is why the medical discourse has displaced the alchemy discourse in dealing with health issues, and that is why there are no grants financing research of the “philosopher’s stone” or transmutation.

With this short introduction to the notion of discourse, we will return to our main topic and re-examine the relation between discourses and listening. In our daily, networked activity, we find ourselves in the middle

of negotiations, meetings, acquisitions, or experimental initiatives listening to others and ourselves from multiple discourses. We act out of them, and we say their distinctions, but we rarely take the time to examine rigorously the discourses to which these distinctions belong. We name the words that denote the distinction, but we do not ask ourselves what the particular distinction distinguishes. That way of being settles-in a particular 'listening,' and it is what is revealed when we ask obvious questions in particular conversations. Questions like: "What do you mean by 'information'?" or "You mentioned that you 'think,' so, what do you do, that when you observe yourself doing it, you claim to be 'thinking'?" or "What is the distinction Leadership?" These types of casual questions, almost trivial, are the sudden cause of tectonic unsettlements, discoveries, and innovations, when the questions are taken seriously with humor.

Modern human beings speak profusely about love. We speak about love as if we are describing something, which exists independent of the discourses and traditions we embody, in which the distinction love shows up. The discourse of Romantic Love, as articulated by Shakespeare in Romeo and Juliet, is a passion worth living, even if it jeopardizes families, social traditions, or personal safety. Indian discourse on love is different. In the Indian discourse, virtues like devotion, selflessness, and a path of mutual recognition, in which a sense of mutual caring is nurtured, are distinguished and cultivated. Passion, for this discourse, does not play any interesting role in love. Furthermore, love is intended to sustain social traditions. A third discourse is what we could call "MTV Love", in which "feeling," sensations, eroticism and fitting into fashion stereotypes, shows up at the very core of what love distinguishes.

In a very different domain, the words "Just-in-time" for Japanese automakers distinguishes practices such as close collaboration with providers, and full power to employees in the production line to stop immediately the plant in case of quality problems. None of the American competitors have distinguished those practices as central to the distinction "Just-in-time." Both use the same words, but teaching about them means listening to very different phenomena.

Therefore, when asked about what a particular word may be distinguishing, a rigorous answer may follow a structure like: "I only can recognize the word (xyz) as naming distinctions in three discourses. In two of those discourses, I am familiar with what the distinction distinguishes. In the first one, it distinguishes (x) actions and (y) criteria for assessments, for this (z) particular community. In the second discourse, the distinction distinguishes... In the third discourse, I am not competent to articulate the

distinction.” In making explicit the discourses to which the distinctions belong, our listening becomes open to new interpretations.

In the very moment we are listening, we cannot control or direct the discursive distinctions out of which we are listening; we just react, we are triggered. Our listening unfolds in multiple discourses of linguistic distinctions. It is just the way it happens. Later on, we have the chance to observe our listening (which requires great acceptance, rigor and humor). We can listen to our listening. We can scrutinize the distinctions out of which we listen and we can sharpen, discard, enrich or invent new ones. The fact that we cannot drive our listening in the moment it happens does not excuse us from cultivating a more meaningful and powerful listening to take care of our business and communal worlds. Shallow discourses and distinctions bring forth shallow listening, and shallow listening orients us towards shallow enterprises.

Narratives as Framing the Space of Our Listening

Now we will introduce our next linguistic unity pertinent to our exploration of listening: narratives. Narrative activity is unavoidable for contemporary human beings. We always encounter ourselves in an already existing storytelling activity. We encounter others in the very moment that our story frames the space in which that particular other, simultaneously with the framing story, shows up. We encounter things around us—objects, volumes, sizes—in the spatial texture of our narratives. The whole existence of the experience of being with others in a shared world is brought in storytelling. The story and the action take place at the same time, as a non-divisible unity. There is no action without the story in which the action occurred. In synthesis, we human beings live in a world constituted in narratives.

Again, it results that it is more appropriate to say that narratives happen to us than to say that we made them. Both situations are common, but the first mode is more pervasive, overlooked and powerful. We learn, or better yet, we absorb narratives in the cradle of our historical communities, in every single gesture, retribution, dialogue, or complaint. We learn about what is meaningful and what is not in the stories that shape our communal practices. We learn what is valuable or wasteful from our stories, in the very same way that we learn about what is good or bad, beautiful or distasteful.

When asked: “Who are you?” we will give a story. When asked: “What is your country about?” a story will come out of us. When asked: “What is

the role of your community in the world?” a succession of claims, assessments, facts and promises will be brought to the world, out of a mouth, claimed by someone. “What do you feel? Are you sad? Where is this excitement coming from?” are all questions urging us to narrate a story to make sense—a partial, transitory, controversial sense—of our incommensurable sensorial and emotional drift.

Transparent storytelling is the happening of existence, dwelling in our listening.

In narratives, worlds are articulated and brought to existence. In narratives, a multiplicity of distinctions coming from different discourses are secured in a rich net of causalities, stimuli, and motivations, in which elements are connected with science, and science with business, and business with politics, and politics with ethics, and ethics with eroticism, and eroticism with spirituality, and so forth. The totality of existence rests in our narratives, and in the systems of narratives out of which we are revealed.

Narrative and narrations² are so familiar to us, that they become completely transparent. They are just like air, we notice them when they are not available to make sense of an unusual event or when we do not “have words” to address some situation. However, narratives and narrations have some constitutional peculiarities that are important to notice.

Narratives bring forth time. They assert some past events, which reveal themselves in the present that some outcome will unfold in the future. And in doing so, sometimes they open up the past to the scrutiny of the future. The past is not behind, and the future is not ahead. The past never passes. The future never arrives. Past and future exist as a narration in the present, and the present is never directly accessible, but is only a posteriori narration.

Narratives bring forth a plot. In narration, the happening of our listening is already making us part of a plot. It creates who “we” are and who “they” are. It constitutes who I am. It generates the space—institutions, equipments, and landscape, etc—in which human agency takes place. It constitutes what is reality—a shared consensus on the narrative that “describes” the situation; the controversial—the struggle among different

² George Lakoff in his book “Moral Politics” makes a valuable contribution in exploring contemporary American listening in politics and moral issues. What he explored is that narratives, out of which people listen, can be understood as a set of “conceptual metaphors” that are transposed from one domain of existence to another domain, for the sake of supporting the rhetoric of an ethical orientation.

narrations that contend to give a valuable account of the situation; and the emergent—a new fact in the horizon for which an adscription of possibilities cannot be done yet by the current speakers and listeners. It brings what is clear, and what is nebulous, all at once. In this sense, in listening we are spoken by language.

Narratives bring forth connectivity. In listening, events from a multiplicity of phenomenological and existential spaces get connected. This connectedness that happens in listening is unlimited. There is always a new plausible story that can connect the very same facts, exclude previous facts, or add new ones. This infinitude of listening is in the very nature of language, and is self-evident when observing the way in which our listening, individual and communal, of a situation changes over time.

Narratives are not true or false. Lies can be found in a narrative, but narratives as a whole are not true or false. Instead, we propose that narratives are relevant or not relevant because of their capacity to bring valuable possibilities and power in dealing with some particular historical concerns.

Listening from the wrong narratives can bring a business to bankruptcy or can make life miserable. Unbridgeable narratives invite tragedy. Narrations can make us listen to what remains unchanged and stable in our existence or, on the flipside, narratives can open our listening to the overwhelming impermanence of every single substrate of our life. In narratives, we listen to our whole existence or just to the fragmented smallest details.

In listening to the narratives out of which our listening happens, we have the chance to examine our worlds and how the narratives knit those worlds. We can see the possibilities of our listening and its constraints, their magnificence and their misery. We can experience the anxiety of suppressing some of these narratives that, a second before, were settling us into an apparently solid and unchallengeable world.

Modern human beings, coming from Rational-Cartesian tradition, have the tendency to develop strong attachments to the narratives out of which their listening is organized. Sometimes this attachment can be extremely valuable, particularly when we are trying to improve a practice or a result in a particularly given world (resetting a lab experiment, improving a soccer play book, implementing a new software, or attending to a particular type of customer complaint). Sometimes this attachment can be extremely damaging and wasteful, especially when you are dealing with old recurrent breakdowns not yet solved or even well understood, or when

you are trying to invite “out of the box” thinking. We think that there are a few issues that make this attachment difficult to remove:

1. First, each time you change a narrative out of which you are listening, the whole context of your actions changes. Consequently, actions that in the “previous listening” showed up as valuable, intelligent, or efficient, most of the time show up in the “new listening” (articulated by the new possible narration) as wasteful, unintelligent, or inefficient.
2. Second, we have the tendency to act out of the fundamental misconception³ that errors, failures, and mistakes can be avoided out of rigorous thinking. Therefore, making mistakes, or not acting in the best possible way, is seen as a “lack of intelligence” or as a “structural weakness” that gets exposed and damages self and social “image”.
3. Third, we have difficulties in emotionally embodying the fact that major innovation requires, simultaneously, major expansions of ignorance. We don’t celebrate new ignorance; we endure it.
4. Fourth, we moderns are not yet familiar with the fact that our present is constituted in “multiple realities,” whose only boundary is the creativity of the social network of conversations in which the listening of our communal actions takes place. There are as many “realities” as listening converging in a conversation. Instead of welcoming the richness of this diversity, we try to deny it with the maneuver of the “objective” point of view.
5. Fifth, we demand of narratives something that only Gods or Goddesses can do: to give a complete, comprehensive, and accurate account of a particular situation (and maybe not even they are interested in or pretend to do that). Narratives are paths to potential valuable action in the middle of uncertainty and partial information. So a narrative should be assessed by the possibilities and risks it opens, not by its capacity to include all potential variables affecting the situation, or all potential scenarios.

For whatever reasons we can possibly articulate, attachment to narratives often shows up as rigidity, poor listening, intolerance, fundamentalism, righteousness, self-victimization and other sorts of listening, depleting communal life. Nevertheless, attachment to a narrative, even clearly questionable, can hide some wisdom in it. Changing narratives can have

³ Ready-to-hand and Present-to-hand...level of competence...innovation intents context.

enormous consequences, for good or for bad (as shown in the rhetorical Media battles). It can be an incredibly unsettling experience triggering deep anxiety, with unpredictable outcomes. It can disconnect our worlds and our nervous system all at once. It can be the most beautiful, trembling and liberating experience. Therefore, mastering the consequences of a particular unsettling is what makes dialogue fruitful.

Narratives collapse, bringing nothingness, disorientation, darkness, noise, and void. And when carefully nurtured—with new questioning, delicate silence, some ontological practices and some good friends, colleagues or partners—they bring a whole new listening, and a whole new world.

With these brief strokes on narrative and listening, we hope we intrigued and challenged you enough to explore a vast territory.

Commitments

Now we will introduce the third distinction we are grasping and shaping in order to explore listening. We call this distinction Commitments. Commitments are a human practice revealed by very special types of verbs—verbs that when uttered, execute, ascribe a force, and describe the action. John Langshaw Austin (Oxford, 1911-60) distinguished this peculiarity of language, and developed the notion of performative verbs (the word “performative” was invented by him with the purpose of naming this new distinction). The examples he used in his seminal text “Performative Utterances^b” were the “I do” in the course of a wedding ceremony, “I apologize,” “I name you...” and “I bet you...” His central claim was that in each of the above cases, the distinctiveness of the verb was its capacity to execute the action and bring a new reality for all concerned at the moment of uttering it. However, a closer examination of the conditions out of which the action could result in a happy outcome led him to pay closer attention to communal context. For instance, in order to constitute a new marriage the “I do accept...” needs to happen in the presence of social roles invested with the declarative authority to validate the act; it needs a legal system and to proceed in accordance with established customs.

We will take Austin’s monumental contribution to the elucidation of language and re-frame it in terms of a listening phenomenon⁴. We maintain that every single utterance happening in conversations is listened to, at least in Modern Communities, as a particular form of commitment. Let’s

⁴ This philosophical insight, of enormous consequences, was originally articulated in the early 1980’s by Fernando Flores as “Hermeneutical Pragmatics.”

take as an illustration the utterance “we will make the energy sector a sustainable business in ten years”. It would follow an unhappy path (in Austin’s terms) if it was listened to as: “...all present-day politicians are trying to show up as ecologically conscious...” (mistrust) or “...that official is not entitled to make those declarations and to execute budgets in that sector...” (failure to perform communal procedures and regulations). Otherwise, if we explore the happy path in terms of listening, it can execute very dissimilar commitments. It can be listened to as a request of time “they are asking us to be patient for another 10 years”. It can be listened to as an offer “if you vote for me, I will make the energy sector ecologically appropriate and economically viable”. It can be listened to as an assertion about the time needed to complete that sort of project if listened to as “I predict a ten-year schedule”. It can be listened to as an assessment if listened as “our energy sector is a predatory industry making private value out of social and ecological depletion”.

Action, as we mentioned before, is unbreakable from the narrative that frames it. In other words, action—an utterance of commitments--always already exists as interpretations in a particular listening. It is not a failure or a problem of rigor, education, clarity or discipline. We human beings are historical beings that continuously shape our listening in the languages of our communal practices. Therefore, paying close attention to the commitment we listen to from others’ utterances is a fundamental sensitivity.

Once we listen to a commitment requested of us, we dispose ourselves to perform two actions. First, if we accept, to oblige ourselves in the present to deliver a particular condition of satisfaction⁵ to the requestor in the future. And second, to promise to the requestor, in the present, that we will deliver a condition of satisfaction in the future. In promising, we reduce others’ uncertainty by assuring a “piece of the future” out of which others can take care of their concerns.

The beauty of commitments is that they are grounded in nothing but the active social consensus to allow individual human beings to invent themselves out of their will to bring forth commitments, and to address its consequences. This ontological fact is at the base of modern freedom. There are no reasons needed to validate a commitment but the individual’s will and the embodied social norm of valuing and caring about communal language.

There is always a risk of “mismatch” of interpretations about the nature of the commitment, about the conditions of satisfaction of the commitment,

⁵ See Language of Action Paper

or about fulfillment procedures and time. An enormous proportion of day-to-day coordination waste in business, politics, military, or private life comes from a poor understanding of language as performative. This crucial dimension of language, grasped initially by J.L. Austin and enriched by philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricoeur and especially Fernando Flores, is still largely ignored by the educational institutions.

Performative verbs can be organized following different taxonomies. We are inclined to use six families of commitments: Declarations, Assertions, Assessments, Requests, Promises, and Offers. Declarations are about committing oneself to bring forth new distinctions into the world (i.e. language, naming institutional roles, declaring new products, declaring new wars, condemning/absolving, etc.) and to assure the authority and power to keep the commitment over a period of time. Assertions are about committing oneself to produce evidence, in accordance with already established distinctions to observe, procedures to observe, and skills to observe, to testify an event as true or false. Assessments are about committing oneself to ascribing positive or negative value to current events (actions, performance, competences, style, etc.) for the sake of bringing forth new possibilities. Requests are about committing oneself to expand communal opportunities by virtue of defining other people's actions. Promises, as we already mentioned, are about committing oneself in the present to complete a condition of satisfaction in the future. Offers are a special type of promise in which we commit ourselves to invent an exchange that will result in mutual benefit.

As the reader will notice, all the commitments we just distinguished have important consequences in terms of our capacity to listen and be listened to. And although we will not develop the topic, we would like to mention that the way in which people engage in conversations, commitments, and exchanges has enormous consequences in developing personal and institutional identities and shaping cultural styles.

Finally, to close this account on listening and commitments, we want to call the reader's attention to exploring your listening of others and your listening of yourself in terms of which are the commitments being listened to in the conversation being developed. Every single time a mouth speaks, we listen to a set of commitments.

Listening to Social Practices

Until now, we have been talking about listening, emphasizing the way in which the language of words shapes our worlds and our possibilities in those worlds.

We have the experience that paying serious attention to language in business, politics and design has immense benefits. Nevertheless, we would like to prevent you from narrowing your inquiry into listening by a constricted or mechanical understanding of language. Our languaging is dynamic, vital, and errantly unfolding into the historical drift of our worlds. Languages, in a fundamental sense, are social practices of distinguishing multiplicities of patterns that matter in dealing with historical human concerns.

There are languages beyond the language of words (visual languages, spatial languages, musical languages, forms languages, choreographic languages, etc.). However, for the purpose of this paper, we will continue using the word “language” to denote “language of words,” unless we explicitly say something else.

At this point, we will add a new contextual dimension to explore the territory in which language and listening thrive. Our listening is continuously happening in the middle of our practical involvement with others, in dealing with issues emerging out of our shared worlds. At every moment, listening is vigorously shaped by those activities, habits, voids, and silences of the communities we live in. We belong to richly interwoven networks of practices that are establishing the recurrent patterns of interaction that shape our nervous systems and project our habits. Most of those practices are abstrusely transparent to us. We learn them without noticing. Or we learn them early in our lives, and then, once we master them, they become transparent and we forget them. They leave our conversations to dwell in the patterns of our nervous system.

Engineering is an old, highly institutionalized, extended, diverse and powerful contemporary practice. Therefore, let’s choose engineering to explore our question of how social practices shape listening. Engineering is about inventing platforms of stable recurrences that deliver reliable support to human agencies. It can be a minuscule piece of silicon containing millions of transistors, or a physics lab orbiting the planet. Engineers build “things that work” to make the work of people possible. They build networks of devices to support the current social division of

labor. When asked about the airplane they are building, they never say things like “I have the feeling this one may fly without problems...if it is not too overloaded. In any case, it will give you an exuberant experience, intense and beautiful.” Instead, they will speak in an assertive fashion saying something like “the model BNG-444 has 50 tons cargo capacity, a flying range of 20,000 miles, a cruise altitude of 36,000 feet at the speed of 650 miles per hour, and can lift off from a distance of no less than 0.9 miles”. Engineers are trained to deal with the materialness of existence with precision and unambiguous language. They are negatively assessed in their work communities if they fail to be clear, explicit, rational, or efficient. They reject with overwhelming intensity, get irritated or indignant about other’s lack of rational, measurable and explicit articulations. There lies the embodiment of their virtues, their power, and also their black spots. Engineering practices, habits, emotional repertoires, narratives, scientific discourses, and ethics, focalize listening toward what is measurable, controllable, and predictable. This type of listening shows up as extremely powerful when dealing with objects, artifacts, networks of devices, and other stable mechanisms.

In opposition, Engineering Listening has the tendency to deny and undervalue all of what cannot be intelligible in those terms—for instance: aesthetic taste, emotional attachments, “non-rational” choices, existential crises, politics, or marketing. Most of these Engineering Listening patterns are not learned in an explicit, procedural fashion. Most of them have never being articulated in language. Nevertheless, they live in the spaces in which the discipline is at work, in the infinitude of practices that engineers learn in their faculties, their fabs, in the social activities in which they share: how they talk (and do not talk) about their outfit, their shopping experience, and their new style, in the way they feed themselves and experience food, or in the way in which they plan and manage their lives.

It can be a discipline or it can be an urban subculture we belong to. In either case, the background that configures our listening remains hidden and only partially accessible to us. We have the chance to notice it when we change cities, when we have to lead a project overseas, when we change from one business to another, or when engage in a friendship with someone from another culture. We discover the background in a painful way: we notice that our listening of situations will often mislead us. This will be imperative to let ourselves be unsettled, to navigate unintelligible social practices, and to let new languages emerge and re-shape our listening. Foucault had a nice statement pertinent to those situations in which the language of our listening is called for an examination: “Language starts where communication fails.”

Listening is not only about listening to the language of words, but also to the language of practices, the languages of cultures in which those practices flourish, and the language of emotional dispositions that orchestrate the whole space. All these dimensions come in concert, with their tensions and with their harmonies.

Listening to Unarticulated Dispositions

Affects, moods, emotions, feelings or sensations. Is it possible to talk about listening without even mentioning these controversial, unclear, inexhaustible, and fundamentally resistant to articulation, ways of reacting in situations? The answer is self-evident, and we will now work with the basic question about how emotional dispositions play a role in shaping listening?

Moods as the Background which Orients Communal Action

We subscribe, following the tradition of many philosophers among which Nietzsche and Heidegger are major figures, that moods cannot be understood as “a part” of listening, or as a hazardous “noise” in the middle of listening. Moods and emotional dispositions are what call for the listening to show up as it does, in the moment that it does. Moods bring forth, orchestrate, and open up the listening like a tuneful fugue. Moods are the space in which the whole gets manifested. Moods are like the feminine in the marriage, they organize the background that silently drives the world of the family long before the masculine has the chance to bring reasons and rational choices into a world that has been already framed.

Moods, as we are crafting the notion, have a holistic quality: they organize the incessantly unfolding background out of which magnificent worlds show up; and at the same time, they are shaped and mature, grow in subtleties and harmony, gain wholeness and simplicity—as does music, wine, poetry, dance, painting or science—out of the recurrences and cycles of those very same worlds. They orchestrate and get orchestrated in every cycle of life.

Is it not moving the Buddhist Loving Kindness that brings care and reverence to time and each impermanent gift of existence? Is it not unsettling the selfless Devotion with which Indian people care for their spiritual communal life? Is it not distinctive Japanese Honor, Brazilian Playfulness, Mexican “Warmness,” Argentinean Passion, French Garb, German Will, English Phlegmaticness, or American Excitement?

At this point, we want to warn you that we are making a gross generalization. We are not trying to accurately describe the moods that inhabit the above traditions we mentioned. We are not trying to be just, and build a pondered assessment of their emotional dispositions. We are clear that not each human being, belonging to those traditions, is a venerable embodiment of those moods. What we are trying to do is to open up a possible perspective in our listening to appreciate what we call moods, and we think that each of you have had that experience in your own way. That is what we want you to pay attention to, and let it grow in your listening of worlds.

On the other hand, moods are long lasting “music” orchestrating phenomenal undertakings and also aberrant wastes. Each music has its own tragedies. Nobody knows what is going to emerge. The seasonal cycles of currents of the river move the rocks, the sand, tree debris, leaves, and every single particle with astonishing perseverance: taking here and leaving there, one time after another, day after day. Suddenly, a new sand bank emerges, a new river island, a new river branch, or a shortcut that dries what before was a beautiful waterfall. That is the way in which moods shape our worlds.

First, what is interesting to notice is that moods are not personal, individual, subjective responses. Moods are social and historical phenomena. We experience the mood that gathers, holds together, and inhabits the traditions in which we live. Moods spread like a viral epidemic, among members of a community, a company, a task team or a family, shaping possibilities by orchestrating the background.

Second, we claim that what distinguishes a mood are not the physiological states, body sensations and body postures that accompany a particular mood. We can find a mood of Resentment with a wide variety of different sensations, postures, or body language. We think that moods are embodied temporal dispositions for action. What makes Resentment distinguishable as a particular mood is the structure of commitment we can ascribe to it. We do not think that the structure of commitment is the mood. What we claim is that the stable structure of commitment we ascribe to the mood—as a plausible pattern of dispositions to act—is the ontological

condition for the mood to show up as it does. Resentment is a mood that shows up when we are already disposed in the background, without noticing it, to listen to our situation, out of six unchangeable premises:

1. We declare others responsible for having damaged us in some way in the past (betraying a particular promise, not meeting some expectations, etc.).
2. We attribute to them the capacity of being fully aware and conscious of what they did and the consequences for us from what they chose to do.
3. We attribute to them the capacity, knowledge and skills to have acted in a different way to avoid the damage.
4. We declare that they will never recognize what they did, they will be insincere forever, and there is nothing we can do to change that fact.
5. We blame him or her for constraining our capacity to have a full life in the present and for damaging future possibilities.
6. We declare that we are in a disadvantaged position: we cannot fully punish them today, we cannot sustain an open confrontation; nevertheless, we will make them pay by any means possible for all the suffering they have caused us, even though we may damage ourselves in the process

In Resentment, the past takes over the future, and there is no possibility of being out of an already defined plot that makes us victims of a world that is externally imposed on us.

We propose that the conditions for Resentment to show up can be reconstructed as a habitual interpretative pattern of seven assessments and one promise. In this manner, the reconstruction opens up the possibility of unfreezing the mood—revealing the mood as a mood, and the prospect for the mood to be reconstructed in terms of commitments that, after examination, can be changed or transformed into new actions, regaining a fluid relation with our past and our communal futures. Moods change because our possibilities of being in our worlds change. Moods do not change out of mere “motivational exercises.”

We re-appropriate our history and we reinvent the future with others, without more obstacles than our own attachment, traditions and

convictions. These obstacles are not minor. They are rooted in pervasive beliefs and values, and invested in the actual multiplicity of embodied identities. There are worlds at stake.

We claim that unsettling and affecting other's moods for the sake of bringing forth new worlds—markets, communal activity, or friendship—is an extremely relevant competence. Any executive involved in a Restructuring Process, or in managing a Merge & Acquisition process, will not hesitate in recognizing the astonishing waste produced by Resentment. Any politician involved in a “democratization” process, after a dictatorship or any other form of authoritarian regime, will recognize the necessity of recognizing the crimes, repairing, and letting the new shared future cure the wounds. There is no new business, if every conflict of the present just gets turned into an unresolved past occupying the whole future.

Unsettling Resentment may open the path to opposite moods, like Serenity, or Gratitude. In Serenity we accept the past as past; as never behind of us, but as a permanent call for new interpretations and new actions that we will never predict or control. At the same time, in Serenity, the future shows up as a continuous emergence of possibilities for us and for others—uncertain possibilities that could show up as negative or positive, that we will or will not be able to transform into value. We accept the future as coming with all sorts of surprises. As the Nobel Prize winner, Octavio Paz, stated, “The search for a future always emerges in the re-conquering of a past.” We propose that Serenity may emerge out of the following embodied ontological structure:

1. I accept the facts of my existence as I can recognize them today and as they may be shaped in the time to come.
2. I accept that the future continuously unfolds unpredictable interpretations about the reasons and consequences of my/our past and my/our future possibilities.
3. I accept that at any moment there are possibilities I will embrace and possibilities that I will lose forever.
4. I accept that the past and the future are out of my control.

There is a beautiful prayer that call us to Serenity:

“God, grant me the courage to change the things I can change,
the serenity to accept those I cannot change,

and the wisdom to know the difference”

Serenity is the mood that disposes us to accept the ungroundness, impermanence, and uncertainty of existence. Gratitude is the mood that disposes us to celebrate our existence by the very fact of no non-existence. “Whatever has happened, and whatever will happen, thank you.”

Third, an interesting aspect of moods is that they are stable. By stable, we mean that they do not change much through time. On the contrary, emotions can be very variable. An Ambitious task force can experiment with many different emotions in a day. They can get excited by their results, then get overwhelmed by a new assignment, then get grumpy and defensive after failing on some critical goals, and then absorbed in what they are doing. Although moods almost always change gradually, we do not say that the task force team is Ambitious, and then the following hour, that they are Resigned, and then the next day that they are Envious. If we confront that situation, the most probable assessment we will make is that the task force team has a Volatile mood. We propose that what distinguishes moods from emotions is that while emotions are triggered by specific events that affect our immediate possibilities of action in a particular domain, moods are triggered by the transparent understanding of the possibilities of being available for a role identity of set of role identities embodied by individuals of collectives in a particular world (a nation, an industry, a company, or a functional area). The stability of moods is related to the stability in the possibilities of being of a particular being, in their particular shared worlds. As we already mentioned, the transparent understanding of the possibilities of being (mood), ascribed to that being, can be reconstructed as an ontological structure of commitments, and by virtue of that, it become accessible, and subject to evolve.

Fourth, mood is the most powerful dimension of listening. It is powerful because it is already there, in advance. Long before we intend to think, the mood previously shaped the space of possibilities, and found the things and options that matter and simultaneously hid what doesn't matters. It is powerful because is extremely pervasive, familiar, and transparent.

In simple terms, moods are fundamental in defining how time gets opened (or closed) to us, to our team, our companies, our communities, our regions, or our epoch. We will take the risk to say that Resentment, Envy, and Bad Temper are temporal structures that are very similar. The differences come out of the object or circumstances out of which some imputations are ascribed.

The kind of structure that may trigger our Envy is the background interpretation that somebody is “damaging” us because of being gifted in some way, taking for him what he does not deserve by merit, taking for himself what was improperly given (presumably by a failure of some divine entity mismanaging human affairs). In addition, he knows this. And in knowing it, he still continues abusing what was improperly given to him (or not given to us).

Bad Temper has a different edge. It can be seen as Resentment, but subtracting the Declaration of not being able, or being in position, to punish back. In Bad Temper this declaration turns into the opposite: “I Declare myself entitled to express my frustrations without any considerations or review of the background out of which my reactions are brought.” In other words, there is a Declaration that validates my authority to treat others in a sort of aggressive fashion, with power to impose a particular interpretation of the situation at the expense of others. What is peculiar in all these moods, as we mentioned before, is that they open up a time horizon in which the past takes over the future, while hiding the “taking over” in itself.

Resignation is another relevant mood to be aware of. The ontological condition for its emergence can be sketched in a structure of:

1. I Assert I have been in this situation many times before.
2. I Declare that this situation is not valuable and it produces damage.
3. I have Witnessed multiple attempts to change the situation, including some I have made.
4. I Declare that none of them have succeeded or will succeed.
5. I Declare that I am right and there is nothing that will change my opinion.

Resignation is ascribed when we are in position to reveal a pattern of interpretations in which the above fourth condition gets satisfied. At that point, the future becomes fixed, the emergence of new possibilities is closed, and Resignation gets closed to the resigned by virtue of being experienced as a truthful, accurate external description of the world. In Resignation, time opens up as a future ahead, already defined.

There are many moods such as Boredom, Skepticism, or Depression that are variations on what we have distinguished as Resignation’s structure. In

Boredom, nothing new can show up, only the continuous repetition of the average way of being, in situations already experienced. We would say that “bored people” or “bored cultures” are those that have an extremely efficient habit of reducing all potential new emerging dimensions of the world and any potential unsettling situation, to something that has been already experienced, as something that is bringing nothing but cosmetic, non-substantive differences, and most likely wasteful confusion.

Skepticism can be articulated in different directions: First, as a Resignation that pretends to be grounded in rigorous explanations of multiple sorts, that do not make any relevant difference with the structure of Resignation we already proposed. Second, as a sort of cautiousness, prudence or pondering, that offers a whole new outlook of the future, in which emergence, although risky, would be available. Skepticism, in the sense of prudence, is already a mood that stands on the opposite side of Resignation.

As we mentioned before, unsettling a mood that is “opposing” time often will bring the “reverse” mood—reverse in the sense of a mood that will re-open fluid and vital relations with the past and the future in an unlocked present. Conviction, Ambition, and Resolution are moods that venture us to a future that, although unpredictable, risky, or unknown, is coming as fate. A fate that emerges from our way of being and that unifies and vitalizes our agency.

Conviction is a mood that we ascribe when we observe a pattern of interpretation like:

1. I declare I will bring historical changes to this community and to myself.
2. I declare that I can see the insurmountable obstacles of our enterprise in the sight of the ubiquitous misleading commonsense, but not in the world.
3. I declare that I am not fully prepared, not fully aware, and not even certain of the final outcome, but nevertheless, I am clear that nothing but my full commitment in this enterprise is valuable for me.
4. I declare that no matter what gets interposed, if we persevere in becoming what we are, we will succeed in our purpose.

In conviction, our past is fully encompassed by the future. As far as we can see, Ambition and Resolution only differ from Conviction in their sensitivity to the historical singularities--embodiment of an emerging discourse or emerging historical innovations—of the Being, that call her to a dream, a dream that is also her fate.

There is a mood, which has been the fundamental piece in the thinking of one of the most remarkable and influential philosophers of the past century, Martin Heidegger. He mentioned three moods: Boredom, Love, and Anxiety. Love seems to have been too private for the German philosopher to talk about. Boredom is the mood of the average way of being, which lives life as fitting into already defined social roles. And Anxiety, his central mood (possibly inspired, as Hubert Dreyfus suggests, from the Danish Kierkegaard), reveals that the being, in itself as a being, is no longer adequate to his or her situation (not transparent), and by virtue of this, opens up the possibility to regain his existence for him or herself.

The fifth and last remark we will make about moods sounds paradoxical. Even though moods are fundamental in orienting communal action, they are grounded in nothing but our habits, nothing but our embodied disposition—sometimes in nothing but our addiction to them. This very fact is what makes authentic insights possible, and opens up the space for manipulation and fanatic cults.

Emotions Embodied in Commitments

Let us close our sketch on moods, and turn the conversation towards what we call emotions. While moods are dispositions that emerge from the background understanding of the possibilities of being of the Being (and given that, are more stable), emotions emerge from the contingent possibilities of action that take over Being in facing a particular event. We claim that emotions are triggered by an embodied (transparent) interpretation of the consequences of a particular event.

We say that someone is afraid when we can observe a pattern of interpretations of:

1. I claim that what is happening can have potentially very negative consequences for me.
2. I declare today that there is nothing I can do to avoid that potential damage, but just to hope that something may save me.

Being afraid is a very healthy emotion to have when learning a new skill. At every moment, it is keeping us awake to potential risks. Too much fear paralyzes. Too much fear is not good for learning. In learning to ride a bike, climb a cliff, play chess, or solve a math problem, our coaches command us to do moves that we are hesitant about, or even afraid of taking. Every good beginner becomes aware that in the domain in which he or she is learning, their emotions orient them in the wrong direction. They feel their emotions, they experience the dispositions towards which those emotions orient them, they perceive the bodily sensations those emotions trigger, but they do not go along with them. Instead of following their emotions' orientations, they follow the instructions of the coach, or they follow a previously agreed upon procedure. A good beginner is competent in following explicit instructions, and is competent in acting against their emotional calling. As we said before, to be afraid is not a problem. To be afraid of being afraid is more problematic, because it produces unnecessary stress and impedes acceptance⁶ in the learning situation.

A highly competent performer in a domain, an expert or virtuoso, is in the opposite situation. They go along with their emotions, and in doing so, produce spectacular results and performance. Their emotional repertoire is always orienting them to improve their already outstanding performance. Effortlessly, they come across with a new initiative that will make things better or nicer. Not only that, but when asked to follow an explicit and grounded reasoning to make a decision that is not aligned with their emotions, they will act against the "grounded reasoning" and in favor of their emotion. Typical examples of this sort are financial creditors. Beginning loan executives follow procedures of established practices. If the paper work is complete and the credit score is acceptable, the credit is approved. Expert loan executives do not follow procedures; they take risks based on sophisticated sensitivities to complex patterns and "emotional intuitions." They can reject a perfectly documented case or approve a paperless case, and more relevantly, they have incredibly higher performance.

In this gist, the old Cartesian understanding of emotions as "subjective," "irrational" or "chaotic," is not at all an adequate account of emotional phenomena. Emotional responses are "rational" or "irrational" in relation to the level of competence of the individual or the team that is experiencing the emotion. In virtuoso performers, there will prevail what

⁶ Acceptance in learning is a key emotional disposition. It allows the beginner to observe her habits, the type of breakdowns her habits produce, and brings sensitivity to craft new practices. The opposite of acceptance is pretentiousness or denial, which impedes observation and learning.

we could call “rational emotions⁷,” and vice versa—“irrational emotions” will happen in incompetent performers.

We will dedicate a few lines to talk about what we could call “learning emotions.” We think this is a crucial listening, needed when dealing with innovation, changes, or development of new social practices.

When confronted with incompetence, we can be dealing with two very different phenomena. First, incompetence can imply a preliminary understanding of what is not known. We can articulate that preliminary understanding as a claim that “I know that I do not know something.” We call that situation ignorance, and in favorable circumstances, it is a situation that is conducive to a process of learning. Second, incompetence can imply ignorance about ignorance. Ignorance is covered up, not visible at all. We articulate this situation, as “he does not know that he does not know”. We call this situation in which ignorance is not accessible to the ignorant, cognitive blindness. In cognitive blindness, we act as if we know; only the rest around us can appreciate this delicate situation. We act obliviously, and beyond that, we resist others’ assessments about our blindness. It is not a conscious “defense,” it is just the total unintelligibility of the situation for us.

These two modalities of sensitivity toward what is unknown are present in all of us all the time. Worlds, others, and we are only partially accessible to ourselves; this facticity is at the very core of our existence. Consequently, cognitive blindness is always there, tricking us. Our listening is not trained to listen to our potential cognitive blindness; we tend to live as if this incommensurable space were not there at all. Furthermore, we embody powerful emotions to dismiss its appearance. We will treat extensively the subject of change and learning to learn in other texts. Here we will concentrate our effort in showing what we called before “learning emotions”—emotions that can facilitate or obstruct the learning process. We will talk about Confusion, Tedium and Wonder.

Confusion tends to happen in the moment of the learning process in which our current commonsense is challenged to an extent in which we cannot make sense of the situation anymore. In other words, it is a crisis in the learning process, that opens the possibility to uncover a cognitive blindness, but it is immediately obtruded by Confusion. Confusion is a running away from unsettlement and anxiety.

⁷ We call them Rational emotions, in the sense that they are responsive to transparent varieties of subtle patterns, and make complex situations instantaneously “intelligible,” orienting systematically to effective action. These types of phenomena are presentiated in the M.D. that reacts with a rush of actions in an apparently inoffensive situation, that in the end saves a life; or in the case of the sailor that abruptly changes the navigation course on an apparently calm day, avoiding deadly storms.

We ascribe Confusion to someone, when we observe an interpretative pattern like:

1. I declare that I do not understand what this person is talking about.
2. I declare that the reason for my lack of understanding is either his incompetence in the subject, the inherent failures in his line of reasoning, or the bad faith of the speaker (hidden criminal intentions).
3. I declare that there is no other plausible reason for my lack of understanding.
4. I declare that being confused by this individual is a waste of time and an unnecessary pain for me.

Confusion is an emotional habit that makes us insensitive to cognitive blindness and narrows our learning possibilities.

Tedium is just another way of running away from our “cluelessness.” We ascribe Tedium when we observe a pattern like:

1. I declare that I know perfectly well what he is talking about.
2. I declare that no additional learning will come to me from this conversation.
3. I declare that there is nothing I can possible do to change this conversation.
4. I declare I will tolerate this painful monologue to avoid additional negative consequences.

Tedium keeps us spellbound in an understanding of the world as already “objectively existing” for us. It splits us apart from being active forces configuring the situation.

The third emotion we mentioned, Wonder, is an emotion that opens up the opposite orientation than the two previous ones. In Wonder, the unexpected unsettlement is celebrated and welcomed as the uncovering of a cognitive blindness, which can bring valuable possibilities. We ascribe Wonder when we observe a pattern that is organized as:

1. I declare I do not have a clue of what he is talking about, but I trust his purpose and capacities.
2. I declare that even though I do not know how to talk about it, it seems a positive change for me.
3. I declare that a new opening is being produced for me.
4. I declare that it is an extremely productive and enjoyable situation.

Wonder is a natural emotion for innovators, entrepreneurs, or scientists. Wonder is the embodiment of orientation towards expanded ignorance as something extremely positive.

Summarizing, we have claimed that emotions are:

1. Embodied dispositions for action triggered by a particular event.
2. Ascribed as patterns of interpretation for a particular observer.
3. That can be reconstructed as ontological structures (commitments).

Emotions can be abrupt, intense, colorful and full of subtle sensations. What we claim is that those emotional dimensions are defined by the interpretative patterns that are triggered by the event and its unforeseeable unfolding dynamics. Hence, emotions are not caused by an external event, but by the already embodied interpretation of those events. That facticity reveals fundamental aspects of emotions, as historical, social, and cultural dimensions, that are primordial to the individual subjective experience. Interpreting and emotion-ing are simultaneous dimensions of the listening phenomenon.

Sensations

Until now, we have mentioned two distinctions relevant to what we called “listening of unarticulated dimensions:” mood and emotions. We will add a final distinction that is often related with this territory of affect: Sensations.

However, it is relevant to distinguish what parts of the experience are adequately described as sensations and which parts are better described as assessments. There is a very extended habit of using expressions such as “I have the sensation of being in one of the best moments of my life...” or “I

feel that you are not letting yourself ...” In these cases, “sensation” or “feeling” is being used in a very different way than the phenomenon we are trying to articulate. In general, we will be inclined to interpret that “sensation” or “feeling” as saying something like “I have the assessment that...” In avoiding the word “assessment,” these normal uses of the word “feeling” are often an intent of avoiding the responsibility for providing grounding and declaring the possibilities toward which the assessment is oriented.

Sensations, we suggest, are a self-perceptive phenomenon that can only be testified to by the one that experienced it. For that reason, sensations cannot be asserted, but reported. We cannot build a social witness for a sensation. In a certain sense, sensations are pseudo-assertions—assertions that cannot be verified by another different than the one that experienced it. Sensations are the classic report we are asked to do during a clinical examination: “Do you feel pain...how is the pain? Acute? Dull? Continuous? Variable?” We are also asked for sensations during a yoga class, where sensations are clues for guiding a particular asana. The wine connoisseur or the perfume master reports sophisticated and refined sensations.

Sensations are to listening as the tuning of an instrument is to the musician.

Whole worlds emerge from cultivated complex sensorial experiences where memories, senses and imagination reign.

The virtue of the interpretation of moods and emotions we are proposing is its simplicity, its opening to action, its call to appropriate emotions as a domain of design and cultivation. The risks of the interpretation we propose is that the ontological structures we suggested, to make emotions and moods intelligible, are just the skeleton of the dancer, not Julio Boca performing in Theater Colon. In other words, the structure of commitments does not capture the texture of the ethical and aesthetic values, beliefs, tastes—all sorts of inexhaustible tacit knowledge and contingent singularities that emotional dispositions bring to the situation.

Emotion	Plausible Ontological Structures
Arrogance	<p>“I declare that there is nothing relevant for me to learn in this domain.”</p> <p>“I declare other people’s assessments about my performance are either irrelevant or insincere.”</p> <p>“I declare that my interpretation of the situation is adequate.”</p>
Defensive	<p>“I declare that you have the intention of damaging my identity in some domain.”</p> <p>“I declare that I am not in a position in which I can change or make your intentions visible for you or for others.”</p> <p>“I declare that there is nothing I can do to change this situation, except to avoid your attacks.”</p>
Anger	<p>“I declare that what you do is damaging my identity in this domain.”</p> <p>“I declare that you know what you are doing and the negative consequences it has for me.”</p> <p>“I declare that you are perfectly competent to act in a different way.”</p> <p>“I declare that you are avoiding confronting these facts.”</p>
Excitement	<p>“I declare that I am experiencing an intense desire that expresses the essence of my being.”</p> <p>“I am certain that I am on the verge of satisfying it.”</p> <p>“I can anticipate in the feeling of my body the deep satisfaction I will enjoy.”</p>
Overwhelmed	<p>“I assert that I have made multiple promises.”</p> <p>“I declare that I am not going to be able to fulfill them, even if I devote all my time and energy to do it.”</p> <p>“I declare that there is not a single person on the planet who could help me.”</p> <p>“I declare that I will fail, and my only possible discharge to avoid damages on me is more heroic work.”</p>
Guilty	<p>“I declare that I have produced significant damage.”</p> <p>“I declare that I was perfectly aware of what I was doing.”</p> <p>“I declare that I could have had acted in a different way to avoid the damage.”</p> <p>“I declare that there is no specific action that I can take to repair what I did, and that I am condemned to suffer for what I did.”</p>

Listening to the Listening

Until now, we have claimed that listening has two basic dimensions: Language and Emotional Dispositions. We have also claimed that, in the moment of listening (in the immediate present of listening), listening just happens in the way that it happens. We cannot control it. In this happening of the listening, dispositions and language drive us to encounter ourselves acting in a shared world with others. In this mode of listening, we do not speak the language of our listening; on the contrary, it is language that speaks us. Third, we have claimed that listening (our communal, historical, and individual listening) is embodied in our social practices and habits to an extent that makes it extremely pervasive, transparent, and only partially accessible to us. Finally, we have said that situations in which we get unsettled, and withstand anxiety, are the crucial moments in which we can experience our listening as “a way of listening” and become vulnerable to being influenced and enriched by others.

We have explored and elucidated some relevant dimensions of listening. However, we recommend that you stick to the notion that listening is a holistic phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the categories we use to explore it. Listening is an encompassing “sensing” in which a situation is constituted and experienced all at once.

Listening is more a question than an answer. We do not control our listening; but we can create ontological practices to nurture it. Those practices are what we call “Listening to our Listening”. In this document, we will address only two simple practices: Temporal Domains of Listening; and Listening as a Social Practice.

What we mean by Temporal Domains of Listening is our capacity to observe a particular action in different horizons of time. We act, we observe our actions; we observe our way of observing our actions; and so forth. We do this for as many levels of observation as we consider adequate to the situation. In our daily activity, we jump from one domain of observation to another, often without noticing it. Our purpose is to make this “conversational” practice more explicit, so we can learn from it.

We will distinguish First Order Discloser (1OD), as the one that is absorbed in action, as the one that is acting out of her transparent

Listening.

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understanding of the situation, without seeing the situation as a particular understanding, but as a flow of triggers and responses, as an “objective” and “external” reality in which action unfolds—just doing what she is doing. The concreteness of 1OD’s worlds are not based in the “features” of their worlds, but in their rock solid Certainty. Put in another way, in their effective attachment to a particular background of interpretation.

We distinguish Second Order Discloser (2OD) as the discloser of the 1OD. The 2OD produces the contexts and ascribes the discourses and the plot that makes 1OD’s action intelligible as a particular action. In other words, as we mentioned in previous sections of this paper, 2OD produces the frame in which action is constituted and observed.

We distinguish Third Order Discloser (3OD) as the discloser of the 2OD. In other words, 3OD treats the frames that frame the situation as particular ways of framing the situation. 3OD brings questions about the possibilities that 2OD are bringing forth with their listening and framing of the situation.

We distinguish Fourth Order Discloser (4OD) as the discloser of the 3OD. The 4OD is the discloser of the theoretical discourses out of which 3OD distinguishes frames.

As you will notice, each of the Orders of Disclosing (OD) articulates the situation and events in the immediately inferior OD. We want you to be extremely aware that what is being articulated as action, lives in a completely different domain of existence than the action itself. By different domain of existence, we mean that something which is extremely clear for each of us in our everyday experience: talking about the experience of having been exposed to the presence of Claudio Arrau interpreting Liszt’s “Rêve D’Amour n°3” will never be the experience of having been there. Or as in the sports world, scoring, and talking about scoring, will never be the same. The first phenomenon cannot be reduced to the second one. This facticity of existence is extremely relevant. The irreducibility of one domain of existence into the adjacent domains is what creates the spaces for science, art, spirituality, and thinking.

Often, in developing a project, or managing a business, we perform between the 1OD and 3OD type of disclosers. What we are doing with this paper is to invite you to engage in a conversation of 4OD, so you can navigate different ODs, and explore your listening and its possibilities in each of them.

Now we will introduce the second type of practice we will announce to you in this section: what we call Listening as a Social Practice. We claim that observing our own listening is already a social practice. In observing our listening, we engage in a conversation with ourselves, about ourselves (I, talking with me, about me). It is a social practice in the sense that it involves different observers (I and Me). Nonetheless, it is a very restrictive social practice, because there is not much diversity in the observers engaging in the conversation.

What we propose is that in observing listening (2OD-4OD), one of the critical practices is to create the conversational space⁸ in which listening will be explored and shaped. By creating the conversational space, we mean to gather up a team (network of colleagues, city people, friends, or family members) with the adequate sensitivities, discourses, commitment and moods. The richness of the diverse listening, the tensions between different listening—their controversial articulations—will create the unsettlement and the opening for new thinking to emerge.

As you will notice, our understanding of listening rests less in the “individual,” and a lot more in communal networked skills: taking care of shared concerns, bringing forth commitment, developing trust, crafting identities, designing social practices, sensitivity to mood and emotional dispositions.

Giving attention to these two basic practices that we already perform in some domains of our daily work and convivence, and shaping them so they can reach new domains of our action, nurtures listening and creates a broad space for deepening the question on listening and language.

We had claimed that if we articulate the phenomenon of listening as a particular interpretation of language (theoretical discourses, historical narratives, and structures of commitments), socially organized practices that configure patterns and habits and emotional dispositions (moods, emotions and sensations), we open up a entirely new space of freedom, design, and valuable changes in any business, technological or political project.

Listening to the listening is a fundamental path to thinking.

⁸ The range of diversity can be articulated as the persons we use to designate the participants in the conversation—for instance, the Conversational Space specified by “I talking with Me about Me,” “I, talking with You, about Me,” or “We, talking with Them, about Us,” and all the potential combinations in which we declare different levels of communality/diversity.